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IMMIGRATION

Obama says he won't be deterred by 'one federal judge' on immigration

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A confident President Obama said Wednesday he won't be stopped by "one federal judge," telling a Miami crowd he'll move ahead with his controversial executive action on immigration and vowing his administration will become even more aggressive in the weeks and months to come.

At a town hall meeting hosted by Telemundo and MSNBC, the president also threatened to veto GOP-backed legislation that would undo his immigration action. That measure is expected to come up for a vote later this week.

Mr. Obama took executive steps last year to halt deportations for millions of illegal immigrants, but a federal judge last week blocked the amnesty program, ruling that the president overstepped his authority.

The administration is appealing that decision, and, in the meantime, Mr. Obama gave no indication that he intends to slow his unilateral immigration-reform agenda because of the court ruling.

"This is just one federal judge. We have appealed it very aggressively. We're going to be as aggressive as we can," he told the crowd at the town hall. "In the meantime, what we said to Republicans is, 'Instead of trying to hold hostage funding for the Department of Homeland Security, which is so important for our national security, fund that, and let's get on with passing comprehensive immigration reform.'"

Republicans had planned to withhold funding for Mr. Obama's amnesty program from a Department of Homeland Security funding bill, which is now being debated on Capitol Hill. The department runs out of funding Friday.

Republicans now are pursuing a separate bill that would undo Mr. Obama's executive action but not impact broader Homeland Security funding. Mr. Obama threatened to veto that stand-alone measure — the unofficial 14th veto threat since the GOP took full control of Congress in January.

"I will veto that vote, because I'm absolutely confident it's the right thing we do," he said.

While the president dismissed the "one federal judge" who tossed his actions, other judges also have taken constitutional issue with the administration's steps on immigration.

A federal judge in Pennsylvania, for example,

ruled in December that the executive action violated the Constitution, though the decision came in a criminal case and had little impact on the implementation of the amnesty program.

Meanwhile, Mr. Obama's immigration policy continues to come under fire from both sides, with Republicans accusing the president of playing "partisan games" with the issue, and some activist groups urging the White House to go even farther and stop many more deportations.

Rep. Carlos Curbelo, a Florida Republican who had planned to ride to Miami with Mr. Obama aboard Air Force One but ultimately was denied a seat, said Wednesday Mr. Obama's town hall was little more than a political event that demonstrates he's not yet serious about working with Congress to find real solutions.

"This appears to have been no more than a choreographed, partisan event. I'm not upset about not participating in the town hall, but I am disappointed for the millions of immigrants that are still awaiting resolution to their personal cases. Unfortunately, the president seems to want to continue playing partisan games with their lives," he said in a statement.

"Whenever the president wishes to get serious, I, along with my other colleagues that share his purported goal for immigration legislation, will gratefully welcome his engagement," he said.

On the other side of the debate, Mr. Obama still has not gone far enough for many immigration activists. At the town hall, a young woman asked the president what he could do for her mother, who has been prioritized for deportation.

Mr. Obama didn't directly answer her question, saying simply that the "major social movement" of immigration reform will move slowly at times.

"You don't get everything right away," he said.

The Dream Action Coalition, which casts itself as the "voice for undocumented youth," urged the president to take new executive actions even as the administration battles in court to uphold its amnesty program.

"While it is important to win the court fight, the Dream Action will continue to remind the president that he must embrace executive action as a central element of his immigration agenda," the group said in a statement. "With Congress failing to act, the president's job is not over."